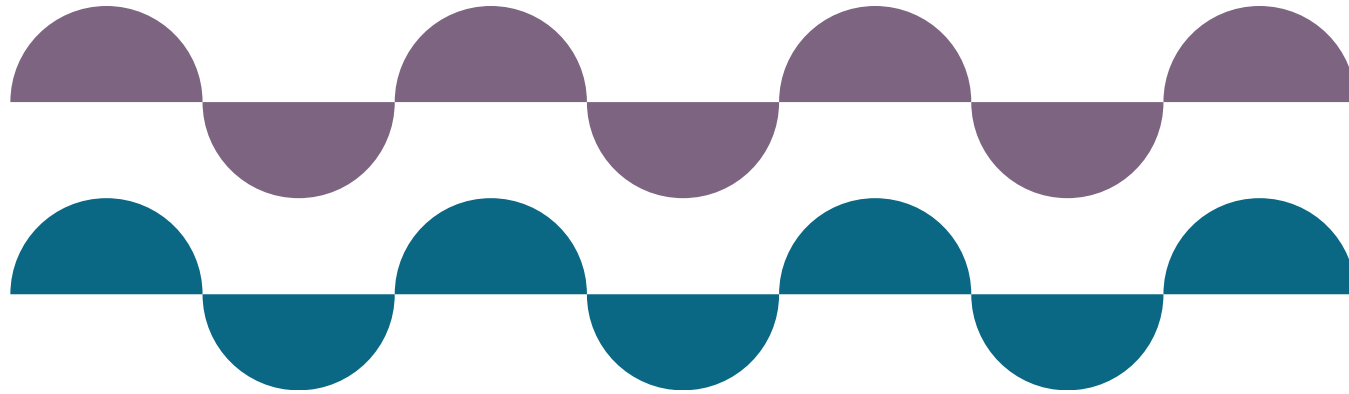


MAKING WAVES

Stories of Second-Generation Immigrants



Credits

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With Thanks

Thank you to all those featured in these pages who generously shared their stories and time for this project.

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The benefits of immigration we hear about most are those that meet our immediate and pressing needs – more people to bolster our aging population and fill labour gaps. We do not hear enough about the long-term benefits of immigration – the contributions made not only by newcomers, but also by their children. Research has shown that children of immigrants, or second-generation immigrants, make invaluable contributions to our communities and are very successful in their educational pursuits and employment. *Making Waves – Stories of Second-Generation Immigrants* gives voice to these remarkable stories.

Born and raised in Canada with a unique combination of global and local perspective, many have more than one or two languages to help them understand and engage in the world. All have two cultures to broaden their view of life. They are supported by highly motivated parents, eager to give their children the best of at least two worlds.

MAKING WAVES

Second-generation immigrants are also first-generation Canadians. Their experience in local schools, playgrounds, community groups, workplaces, and sports teams gives them grounding in a reality different from their parents. They blend in so easily that we forget how they came to have unique combinations of skills and understanding. Throughout the history of Canada, second-generation immigrants have contributed to nation-building in diverse and unique ways.

We have collected these stories to remind us that the benefits of immigration continue and grow through generations; that there are extraordinary Nova Scotians who enrich our province because their parents came here to start a new life.

Jennifer Watts, CEO

ONE-IN-FIVE

In 2016, the population of Canada was **35,151,728**.
At this time, **17.7%** of the population had at least one parent born outside of Canada.
This means that **6.2** million people in Canada reported that they are second-generation Canadians.

WHAT IS FIRST, SECOND & THIRD GENERATION?

1ST

First-generation are those who were born outside Canada.

For the most part, these are people who are now, or once were, immigrants to Canada.

2ND

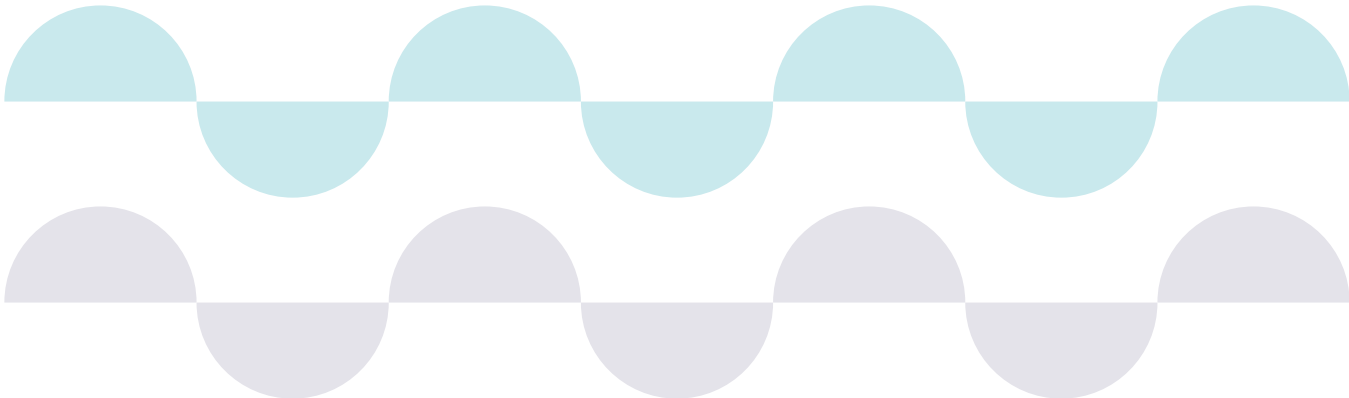
Second-generation are those who were born in Canada, and had at least one parent born outside Canada.

For the most part, these are the children of immigrants.

3RD+

Third-generation are non-indigenous persons who were born in Canada to parents who were also born in Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census



Making Waves introduces you to 25 second-generation immigrants, with one or both parents who were born elsewhere and moved to Canada because of choice or circumstance. They were nominated for this project for several reasons — their commitment to community, their interesting lives and careers, or their desire to create change. Their stories are similar and also quite different — some are strongly connected to their heritage, while others are not; some are accepting in their cultural identity, while others are still working on it.

I too am a second-generation immigrant. My father arrived in 1926 from a mountain village in southern Lebanon — at least two decades before the parents of those profiled here. As the story goes, his father wanted him to study medicine and he said he'd do so in Canada. His uncle had come before him to work as a peddler in rural Nova Scotia — as did many immigrants of that era — and by 1924, had opened a menswear store in Amherst that continues to this day. My father joined the business, working until he was in his nineties, proudly known as "Amherst's best-dressed man."



In 1948, he returned to Lebanon where he married my mother and brought her to Amherst. This exotic Lebanese beauty created quite a buzz in the small town. And that was before the locals tasted her fabulous Lebanese cooking! They raised four children – I'm the baby – and were active in the community, growing to be loved and respected. They were happy and proud to live in Canada while bringing up their children to love Lebanese food and music, to be curious about the "old country," and to embrace their large extended family. As in the stories before you, our home was Canadian, but not *just* Canadian.

Valerie Mansour

Justice John Bodurtha vividly remembers the day last summer when he called his parents in Ontario to announce he had been appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. “My mother started screaming on the phone. She could not be more proud or happy for me.”

His parents came to Canada from Jamaica in 1968. His father had graduated in medicine and his mother in nursing from the University of West Indies, and because of their university’s connection to Dalhousie and Saint Mary’s, they came here to work. They did well, but his father faced racism in the medical profession. “There was an opinion doctors from the West Indies couldn’t live up to Canadian standards.”

There was a strong Caribbean presence in the household with Jamaican food and music, and often guests from the West Indies attending university here. “Many times, I was the only Black kid in class. Seeing those individuals on weekends opened up a new world to me. It gave me a place where I felt comfortable and could be myself. But going to a friend’s house you’d get the look that said, ‘oh, I didn’t know you were bringing a Black friend.’” In his more diverse high school, he felt a connection to African Nova Scotian students.

John felt overt family pressure to succeed. “We had to get our homework done before we did anything else. My mom made sure we were reading all the time. It was: ‘you have to realize that you’re Black and you have to be twice as good as the next person.’ That’s where my drive started. As Black Jamaicans they knew education was invaluable and something people couldn’t take away.”

He attended the University of Western Ontario, earning a B.A. in psychology. “I was struggling with what I wanted to do.” He was attracted to law at Dalhousie by its Indigenous Blacks & Mi’kmaq

JUSTICE JOHN BODURTHA

I pinch myself and realize I am one of the luckiest people in the world to have this opportunity.

Initiative. “It was one time in my life that I had a peer group that was supportive, accepting and non-judgmental. It was where I started to flourish and consider a career in law as a litigator. My parents were thrilled I had found a career path.” John was admitted to the Nova Scotia Bar in 1996 and worked with Nova Scotia Legal Aid before joining the Federal Department of Justice in the Tax Law Services Section. He has served on several community boards including Phoenix Youth Programs.

John is the oldest of three; his sister is a social worker in Vancouver, his brother a federal government scientist. Connections to his heritage continue into the next generation. His two sons, 10 and 15, visit Jamaica regularly with their family and one son has a Jamaican flag in his room.

The significance of his recent appointment is not lost on John. “I pinch myself and realize I am one of the luckiest people in the world to have this opportunity.” He realizes, in particular, what it means to the African-Canadian community. “I feel it when I walk around the courthouse, when I bump into people on the street. It gives hope to a whole generation.”





“That I am here is because of so many wild links,” says Rena Kulczycki, Community Development Coordinator at HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development. “It’s a pretty amazing story.” Rena’s father was born in Warsaw in 1943. He mainly grew up in the US

**RENA
KULCZYCKI**

and came to Canada in 1970. “Every year we would visit Polish grandparents in New Jersey. There wasn’t much else about being Polish that resonated with me,” explains Rena. “I had a singsongy way to spell my name for my teachers.”

Rena’s Korean grandfather was born in North Korea and became a chemistry professor. During the Korean war he became separated for over a year from his wife, and the baby who would become Rena’s mother. They found each other at the end of the war, brought together quite miraculously by a nurse who had met the family. In 1956 he came to Dalhousie University as a visiting professor. His wife and daughter joined him six years later, becoming the first Korean landed-immigrant family in Nova Scotia. Rena’s parents met in Halifax and were married for four years. “My mom went back to Korea when I was 16 and she stayed until I was 28. My father taught grades three and five here. He made room for kids to be curious.”

Rena studied sociology and international development off and on. “I gave myself permission to drop out after a decade of fighting with myself. It wasn’t part of my path to building a better life.” At 21, Rena traveled around Canada with the youth program Katimavik as a participant and later a project leader. “I learned it was different everywhere,” says Rena, who worked with organizations including an indigenous group in B.C. Later they became membership and communications coordinator and public engagement coordinator at the Atlantic Council of International Cooperation, and social justice youth camps organizer with the Tatamagouche Centre.

My father encouraged me
to find my own way. My mother
helped me keep grounded and
connected to culture.

Rena sees the influence of both parents. “My father encouraged me to find my own way. My mother helped me keep grounded and connected to culture. I’m more curious about Poland now. As a gender non-conforming person, it can be difficult to travel because of differences in legal protections for and social attitudes about 2SLGBTQI+ people like me.”

Rena has been at Heartwood for six years facilitating and mentoring in communities and organizations. “We make space for the wisdom and brilliance of young people, of their work with the Youth Action Team at the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs,” Rena says. “They are newcomers who break stigma and take action to address challenges in their communities. I provide training, focused on what’s possible. It’s an opportunity for them to know they are valued.”

Rena also volunteers as a camp counsellor with 2SLGBTQI+ youth, board member of their housing co-op, program facilitator with the Tatamagouche Centre, and certified Dialogue for Peaceful Change Mediator. “I became what people call a social-justice warrior partly because of my understanding of the trauma my family experienced. I have a real sense of giving back.”

A young woman with a cause. That's Habiba Cooper Diallo, who at 12 became concerned about "obstetric fistula," a hole in the birth canal caused by long labour, especially among impoverished women. Now 22, Habiba has won awards, received international media attention and written a book for young adults called *Yeshialem Learns About Fistula*. She started Women's Health Organization International to work toward its eradication.

The daughter of a Jamaican mother and a Guinean/Liberian father was born in Toronto. Habiba's Jamaican grandmother worked as a nanny several months a year in Canada. Family members later moved here including Afua, Habiba's mother. A teacher in Jamaica, she arrived in the '80s, worked in a women's shelter and studied at University of Toronto, ultimately earning her Ph.D. Habiba's father left Liberia at 12 on a scholarship to school in Kuwait and then university. In the '80s he moved to France and then Canada, where he worked on an Ontario farm and then moved to Toronto where he met Afua. He became a bus driver. "He was really passionate about his job. He was a real people person," says Habiba.

The household celebrated their cultures with music, language and food. "My dad could cook like a Jamaican," Habiba laughs. There were cultural connections, including similar words in Jamaican patois and his language, Fulani. Sadly, he died of a heart attack in 2010. A year later the family moved to Halifax as Afua became the James R. Johnston Chair in African Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University, a six-year term. She remained to teach, while Habiba's sister returned to Toronto to study.

Habiba identifies as a Black Canadian from two cultural backgrounds. "When my dad died, I missed him and that culture. My dad didn't talk that much about his life in Liberia and Kuwait and his migration; we held on dearly to each snippet." In Toronto her friends were from various

HABIBA COOPER DIALLO

We connected because we had the same experiences growing up with immigrant parents.

backgrounds. "We connected because we had the same experiences growing up with immigrant parents."

Settling here was challenging for her parents, but not because they were destitute. "It's kinda funny, white Canadians expect that to be the story. It's not my experience but, nonetheless, it was hard for them in the beginning." And they faced racism — "a lot, a lot." Habiba is annoyed to be frequently asked where she's from. "I feel like society always wants to exclude us. I'm Canadian; I was born and raised here. But some people aren't happy with that answer."

At Halifax Grammar, she participated in the school paper and debating club. At 16, she knew she wanted to become a doctor and fight fistula. With her B.A. in African Studies from the University of London, Habiba worked at Dalhousie as a program assistant on a global health contract. She is now job hunting, taking courses toward medical school and working on her organization. "Of all the women who have fistula, less than one percent will get treatment. They don't have enough doctors." As a doctor in Africa, using Canada as a home base, Habiba is going to help to change that.





Henk van Leeuwen has a special piece of paper — a receipt for a deposit on a ticket his newly married parents purchased in Rotterdam to sail to Canada in January 1963. “It was here at Pier 21. It was a cold and foggy morning and I think my mother wondered, ‘where the heck have we landed?’”

**HENK VAN
LEEUVEN**

The van Leeuwens were part of a wave of migration from post-war Europe. “There were good feelings amongst the Dutch about Canada because of Canada’s role in the war. New opportunities loomed large for a lot of younger people,” says Henk, explaining that his parents arrived with some privilege as his father had received a job offer to work at a Dutch-owned textile plant in Yarmouth. “They chose to come here because he had a good job waiting for him.”

Henk had a positive experience growing up, although he did miss having an intimate extended family. “All of my friends had grandparents down the road, or had a grandparent’s house they could go to after school. If I could see my grandparents every three or four years, that was a huge deal.” Because many of his friends were of Anglo or French descent, Henk became the peacemaker. “I was like Switzerland. I was the neutral kid.” And eating chocolate sprinkles on toast for breakfast wasn’t bad for his reputation, either. “But because of the last name, it marked me as different. I would spell the name, pronounce it and do that multiple times.”

The family had a large network of friends, including a few Dutch families. Henk vividly remembers the excitement of waving his little Canadian flag when his mother received her citizenship. “My parents didn’t bring a piece of Holland and try to keep it; they were proud of their heritage, but they lived in a Canadian way.”

His mother was community-minded and in the ’70s helped a Vietnamese refugee family settle. “She was very passionate about giving back. She

My parents didn’t bring a piece of Holland and try to keep it; they were proud of their heritage, but they lived in a Canadian way.

was a social-justice warrior.” Henk has inherited that sense of community and after a 17-year CBC career as a journalist, and then administrator, he joined the non-profit sector. He has served as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Easter Seals Nova Scotia and is now CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Halifax. While living in Charlottetown, he and his wife, Erin, were volunteer hosts for a new family from Afghanistan. Currently, his Rotary club sponsors a Congolese family.

Henk, who spoke Dutch as a child, has visited the Netherlands several times. When his now 18-year-old son was 10, he took him to a family reunion and hopes to do the same with his 15-year-old daughter. While they don’t follow Dutch customs, they happily host visitors from Holland.

“There are powerful stories that get passed on. I remember my mother telling me of walking to school and passing German soldiers on the street. And my father remembers the liberation. He still plays cards with Canadian veterans as his way of saying thank you. I hope the storytelling survives.”

Annie Chau recalls an episode in grade two when a substitute teacher sent her to the “English as a Second Language” class. “Here I was Canadian born, and grew up in the English language. My classmates said, ‘Not Annie; she’s in the advanced reading group!’” Annie was too embarrassed to tell her parents.

Both landed in Kingston, Ontario, from Vietnam in 1979 as part of the “boat people” exodus. Their two children accompanied them; Annie was born three years later. She regrets not learning Cantonese, but her parents seldom spoke it at home with their children. “I think they really wanted to assimilate the family as much as possible.” Her mother had been a teacher, but in Canada she cleaned houses and sewed curtains for a local drapery. Her father, formerly a property manager and soldier, earned a diploma in welding, but became a cook at a Chinese food-chain restaurant. “They struggled with finding work. I think they sheltered themselves and still do.”

Annie describes their beginnings in Canada as “a shock.” Even their first Halloween was confusing. “Children came to the door and they were turning out the lights and hiding.” Their focus was on daily life, living simply, and spending time with close friends. In the summer they would go to Toronto to purchase Vietnamese ingredients. Annie’s friends were mostly first and second generation, of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. “We knew we were visibly different. The foods we were bringing to school were different.” She vaguely remembers her parents and siblings becoming Canadian. “I always was aware that I was born in Canada and they were not. My parents thought that was good. They might have seen it as a safety thing.”

Annie’s sister is an IT project manager in North Carolina, while her brother teaches English at a Kingston College. Annie studied science at Queen’s

ANNIE CHAU

We knew we were visibly different.
The foods we were bringing to
school were different.

University and worked as a respiratory therapist. She earned a B.A. at Western in media and social justice. She worked at a sexual assault centre; ran employment workshops with youth in slum communities in India; and worked for an NDP MP, an AIDS coalition and the Public Interest Research Group in Washington. Annie is now Project Coordinator at the Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association.

Her interest in social justice comes from her mother who staged a protest on work conditions at a textile factory in Vietnam. “They were put in jail for a bit of time. She was telling me when they got out her mother said she’d never find a husband because she was in jail! She’s a strong woman who has beliefs of right and wrong. I love that story.”

Annie now has her Master of Adult Education and is mother to a baby boy. She is planning on a visit to Vietnam. Annie is proud of being Vietnamese-Canadian. “People of a certain age have memories of the Vietnam War. People are usually, ‘oh, that’s great’ that my family is here and doing okay. They are happy to be here and happy with peace in their lives, consistency, and security.”





MIIA SUOKONAUTIO

Miia Suokonautio didn't grow up with the familiar pressures of immigrant parents wanting their children to succeed because of their sacrifices. "They didn't come here to make a better life; they came on an adventure, thinking we'll see what next year brings," says Miia, whose parents moved from Finland to Ontario in 1970, in their early twenties.

The Executive Director of the YWCA in Halifax since 2014, appreciates the stoic, no-nonsense Finnish attitude. She and her two brothers were expected to speak Finnish at home and act respectfully. "I'd get into so much trouble if an older person greeted me before I greeted them. And the first thing you did in someone's house is ask the mother 'what can I do to help?' And you didn't leave until the work was done." Her parents came from farming families who'd lost their land and were internally displaced; her mother speaks of having no electricity when she was young.

Miia's father became a Finnish Lutheran Pastor and studied in Waterloo. He worked in the mines awaiting a church opening. The family settled in Timmins where he was the pastor of two congregations and her mother served the congregation as the pastor's wife. "There was lots of church stuff and Bible camps," says Miia, adding that, on occasion, the family would attend Finnish ceremonies, folk dancing, and theatre. They returned often to Finland; Miia lived there for a year when she was six. "I am the fun-loving Canadian cousin who plays jokes and laughs loud. There's a formality in Finland, expectations that children behave. We are the wild west comparatively."

In 2004 her father returned there and remarried. He continued to work as a pastor, raising eyebrows with ideas of pluralism and gender-neutral language learned in Canada. Her mother lives in Toronto. Miia studied engineering, environmental studies, and social and urban

They didn't come here to make a better life; they came on an adventure, thinking we'll see what next year brings.

policy, followed by a few adventures: working on a farm with Frontier College, a youth project in Paris, in prisons in El Salvador, and with street kids in Nicaragua. Miia completed a Master's degree in social work in social policy, organizations and advocacy in Toronto, where she met her east-coast husband. Their overseas travel included three months in Finland and a United Nations contract in Ghana. While still on the road — in a café in Edinburgh — she applied to be program director at Phoenix Youth Programs. She left there in 2013, and was an IWK emergency crisis team social worker before moving to the YWCA, where she is a strong advocate for women helping to provide housing, employment and other services.

She has taken her children, now 10 and 6, to Finland. "They have an appreciation that they're Finnish. I think they'll grow into it, or they won't and that's fine too." Miia appreciates the concept of Third Culture Kids — those who navigate their own homeland and that of their parents. "When I'm in a Finnish space with a whole bunch of grandmothers, I get that. When I'm in a Canadian space, I get that. That's just how it is."

Stan Kutcher's parents made separate treacherous journeys to Canada from Ukraine after surviving World War II. "My dad somehow made his way as a young man to a deported persons' camp in Germany, got into the allied sector of Berlin and came to Canada, sponsored by a religious organization," says Stan. His mother and family laboured in German work camps, then immigrated to Toronto, sponsored by a church. "They built a life for themselves working in sweatshops. When my grandfather died, he owned three or four apartment buildings in Toronto and he couldn't read or write English. For them, living in Canada was a dream realized."

Stan's father, who spoke seven languages fluently, wanted to study medicine but became a Presbyterian minister. While a student, he met his wife, who became a secretary. The family was poor, living in several rural towns across Canada. "I was always the 'other,'" says Stan. "Every three or four years, I'd become the new kid in school; you learn to fit in or you don't." He believes this made him and his two brothers self-sufficient. "It forced my brothers and I to create our own identities. I saw myself as a Canadian; the Ukrainian part was part of what being a Canadian is." They spoke Ukrainian at home and followed cultural traditions. "Kids made fun that I spoke Ukrainian, but also because I wore glasses."

Because of learning disabilities, school was a challenge. "I still can't spell." But he won a scholarship, earned a B.A. in history and political theory and an M.A. in history from McMaster. Stan worked for a summer with Frontier College, exposing him to new immigrants and First Nations people. He went on to Ph.D. studies in history at York but left to complete an MD from McMaster. Stan completed his residency in psychiatry in Toronto and post-doctoral studies in neuroscience in Edinburgh. In Toronto he established Canada's first comprehensive adolescent psychiatry research program.

THE HONOURABLE STAN KUTCHER

It's the kids who benefit from the lives the parents have created.

After a year of travel with his wife and three kids, including being a visiting scholar at Cambridge, Stan became head of psychiatry at Dalhousie University. Now a world-renowned expert in adolescent mental health, he has worked and researched in over 20 countries. The recipient of numerous awards, including the Order of Nova Scotia, Stan is active in the community as a mentor and helping with International Medical Graduates through ISANS. In December 2018, Stan was appointed to the Senate of Canada.

His parents expected him to work hard, fight poverty, and improve the lives of others. Connections to Ukraine remain; his adult children are aware of their culture, and his daughter complains he didn't teach her Ukrainian.

Stan's brother is a periodontist and the other a gastroenterologist — what Stan describes as the classic second-generation immigrant family. "The first wave when you come to the country, most of the time you spend creating a life for you and your family. It's the kids who benefit from the lives the parents have created. The kids have an incredible opportunity to contribute to the country and to give back. For me it is a privilege to be able to try and do that."





Amina Abawajy's visits to her parents' homeland of Ethiopia are special. "I feel at home there. We got to see our story before it started. And how we're doing today is shaped by the decisions my parents made and their parents made," says Amina. "It was a really humbling and connecting experience. When I go back home, I can see that it's very community-oriented."

Her parents arrived as refugees: her father, Abdulfetah, in 1989, and mother, Sueda, in 1990. The Oromo people were targeted and oppressed in many ways, including by being drafted. They chose Halifax as Abdulfetah's brother was studying here. Abdulfetah completed grade 12 and graduated from Saint Mary's University in chemistry. Unable to find work in his field, in 1999 he started Canadian Way Driver Training which attracts a diverse clientele because he speaks several languages. Sueda studied accounting there as well. Both have been ISANS volunteer interpreters and conduct settlement work. Amina says they are instrumental in her success, "but they definitely faced barriers and challenges."

She has three siblings: Aisha, completing applied computer science and political science; Khadija, just 18, in third-year medical sciences; and Hamza, in grade seven. They volunteer in the community, take Taekwondo and swim. "Almost everything is a family affair; whether it's parent-teacher day or if I'm giving a talk, I can expect the whole family. It's a supportive, all-hands-on-deck situation!"

The family speaks Oromo and their home is a place of celebration for Muslim holidays. The children attended Maritime Muslim Academy. "It was great to have time for prayers and to know my religious holidays were being observed," says Amina. But as one of few Black families, she wishes there was more support and representation.

Amina started university at 16. "I was passionate about international studies as a way to connect to my community. Computer science was

**AMINA
ABAWAJY**

What they give me I hope to utilize
and give back to the world.

a financial decision to bridge my passion with relevant skills." Growing up in Halifax, "navigating the intersections of sexism, anti-blackness and Islamophobia," has shaped her experiences and where she is today — Dalhousie's Education Advisor for Human Rights and Equity Services, ensuring that students, faculty, and staff know their rights and can access resources and services.

Amina was elected student union vice-president academic and external, and then president. She is currently Oromo Community Association's communications officer and vice-chair of African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes. And she has started the Global Humanitarian Initiative Association to counter the "saviour complex" she finds in international development. Amina says she has a complicated relationship with the word Canadian. "I am indigenous in my lands. I think about the responsibilities the government has to my people and likewise the responsibilities this government has to the indigenous people here, the Mi'kmaq." Amina dearly loves her home and also hopes to stay in Ethiopia often. "My family, my parents, my community were able to give me a strong foundation. What they give me I hope to utilize and give back to the world. And I hope that energy continues."

When Jody Riggs was a teenager, he attended a conference about overseas Christian humanitarian work. “I decided I wanted to go overseas and work with people who didn’t have advantages we had,” says Jody. Later, he decided to become a prosthetist.

Jody grew up in Scarborough, the first son of Jamaican parents who knew each other in high school. His mother moved to Canada first, stayed with cousins in Montreal and then returned home and worked in the office of a bauxite mine where his father was a heavy-machinery operator. “I feel that’s when they really bonded, but she had aspirations to go to school,” says Jody, explaining that his father followed her to Canada. His mother studied business and education, and in 1977 started teaching at Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology, where she remains. His father has been a plant manager and supervisor in heavy machinery in food, pharmaceuticals, finance and automotive industries.

Jody describes his upbringing as protected. His mother drove him and his younger brother to a Christian private school every day. He played in a Christian hockey league and attended Christian summer camps. Their church community became their family. At home, they enjoyed Caribbean music, and Jamaican foods on holidays.

After grade 10, Jody transferred to a public alternative school. “I knew I was in a bubble, but happy to get out of it. I knew who I was and what I believed.” His friends were mostly second-generation immigrants, but he encountered racism. “My philosophy is I have been treated differently, but I’m not going to let that stop me. Instead, I try to acknowledge those situations and use them as a motivation to excel.”

| JODY RIGGS

I want my kids to not feel there are barriers to achieve what they want to be.

A year at Bible college was followed by “an eye-opening experience” in university, including Varsity rugby. “Imagine this kid from a Jamaican Christian conservative home playing rugby with guys who are drinking, and women, and all sorts of stuff. That was quite a shock.” He was teased, but accepted because he was skilled. Jody became captain and made the Ontario all-star team. After playing one year in Kingston, he moved to Victoria where for three years he worked at a bank and played rugby. “My dream was to make the national team; my goal was to go as far as I could.” He didn’t make the team, but he did meet his wife while volunteering at the hospital where she was an orthotist. Jody earned his B.A. in kinesiology and health sciences at York University. His parents are proud of him and his brother, a FedEx paralegal law clerk. Pursuing higher education was a given. “That desire was clearly articulated!”

Jody and his wife both found jobs in Halifax in 2017. They have three kids with “some affinity” for their Jamaican heritage. “My goal is making them feel comfortable in their skin; I want my kids to not feel there are barriers to achieve what they want to be.” The family is active in their downtown Dartmouth neighbourhood. “We’re blessed to be there. Rarely are your hopes realized, but they have been for us.”





Gerald Bermundo selects Alderney Landing to meet, a place that holds special memories. “I’m looking at my generation who grew up here and participated in multicultural events, and now watching a later generation doing what we did,” recalls Gerald. The son of

Filipino parents, he was a traditional dancer as a youth and later taught others. “They have their own style and ideas and they bring that to the community. It’s great to see traditions living on.”

Gerald’s parents arrived separately in Canada in 1974. “They each just wanted a change, a new way of life and opportunities to build a family,” says Gerald. “It was by chance they met and were able to share the same growing pains and experiences together.” His mother was fluent in English when she arrived and, as a nurse, worked at a nursing home and at Camp Hill Hospital. His father, a chemist, was a lab technician at Dalhousie University.

“Obviously there was culture shock and cultural differences, but I think their transition here was fairly smooth.” They were active in a small Filipino community that included family members who also immigrated. They often hosted gatherings with Filipino cuisine. Gerald and his brother, now working in a restaurant, attended a Filipino language class. He says, however, his parents ensured they all learned Canadian culture. “The emphasis was more on learning English first and the way of life here.”

He remembers moments of realizing he was different, including “Pioneer Days” at school when everyone wore overalls and he arrived in a colourful traditional Filipino shirt. “I also have a vivid memory of grade one and the teacher asked everyone to do a self-portrait and hung it on the wall. Then I realized looking up I was the only one of a different skin colour.”

**GERALD
BERMUNDO**

I am Filipino-Canadian
and very proud of it.

Gerald graduated from Dalhousie with a B.A. in sociology and also studied commerce. He did website design at CompuCollege. He has worked at the iconic Sam the Record Man and for twenty years at Symcor, a leading provider of business processing and client communications management services, where he is now a technical support analyst.

Through the company, he fundraises for Pathways to Education, a national organization providing after-school programs for youth. Community-minded Gerald has also volunteered for United Way and has been president of the Filipino Association of Nova Scotia for seven years. “I always saw my parents helping out here and back home, sending money, or helping people come here. That’s where I get my drive.” Gerald recalls his dad urging him to study in the summer to prepare for school. “It didn’t feel like it at the time, but I’m happy my dad pushed me that way. A lot of kids feel that pressure, more so for those who have that different cultural background.”

Gerald hasn’t been to the Philippines but hopes to take his fiancé, Jessica, and baby, Grayson, there. “Growing up I had people guess where I was from — guessing everything but Filipino. I’ve been thought of Hawaiian, Spanish, Chinese. I am Filipino-Canadian and very proud of it.”

For Basma Kavanagh, being an artist and poet was not on her parents' agenda for their daughter's future, but they grew to respect it. She discovered that on her Lebanese mother's side, her grandfather was a poet and three aunts wrote poetry as well. "I feel like we do carry our ancestors in a way," says Basma. "There were poets before me and I'm even named after one of them."

Her mother, Afra, moved to the US in 1966 to study. She wasn't planning to stay, but she received a scholarship to do her M.A. in English in Illinois. There she met her Glace Bay-born husband. "This handsome man from Canada," as Basma puts it. Afra had a brother in the US who watched out for her, but her parents were not happy. She is the youngest of 15 and many moved away. "Lebanon is like Cape Breton in a way; everybody leaves."

They lived 10 years in Winnipeg, where Afra taught high school and had her son, now a café owner in Tallahassee, and then Basma. "As her introduction to Canada she really enjoyed it," says Basma. "There were people there from all over the world. She was very social and energetic and always looking forward." They moved to Nova Scotia, where Sana was born, eventually settling in Sydney. Both parents taught at the University College of Cape Breton, now Cape Breton University (CBU).

Basma's father learned some Arabic and the parents visited Lebanon with their young son. The daughters didn't go until recently. To Basma, culture is complicated. "She was Lebanese and we weren't. There was a bit of a wall there. We were half-Lebanese, but what does that mean exactly? That's something I'm still grappling with." Nor did Afra teach them Arabic. "Maybe she was protecting us in a way. She didn't want us to marry Lebanese men and be taken away to Lebanon."

In Cape Breton, she felt more in common with immigrants from Pakistan and India. "My dad was very much a local boy but we weren't. You had

BASMA KAVANAGH

I didn't feel like I had to make art about my identity. I resisted that, but wanted to make a book about my mom and her sisters and her story.

people there — MacDonalds and MacLeans — who had Lebanese ancestors and they knew what tabbouleh is but they were Christians from the north, while my mother was a Muslim from the south."

With her "getting away from Cape Breton feeling," Basma went to Toronto for art school and worked as a tattoo artist. She returned to illustration work at CBU in the Integrative Science Program that combines indigenous knowledge and western science. She and her husband lived in Manitoba, Vancouver Island, and in Qatar. "People there saw me as a little familiar. They'd hear my name and speak Arabic." They eventually settled in the Annapolis Valley.

Lebanese culture is in her work "in subtle ways." Basma has been a finalist in writing competitions, and in 2018 published a poetry book called *Ruba'iyat for the Time of Apricots*. "I didn't feel like I had to make art about my identity. I resisted that, but wanted to make a book about my mom, and her sisters, and her story."





Sana Kavanagh laughs when she's asked to describe herself. "I often say I'm a non-aboriginal Lebanese-Irish Cape Bretoner," says Basma's younger sister. She has worked at the Mi'kmaw Conservation Group, outside Truro, since 2012, as Senior Fisheries Research Advisor, Research and Education Officer, and now Commercial Fisheries Science Liaison Coordinator. She has collaborated with First Nations, government agencies, academia, and the private sector.

Sana was thrilled with her recent first visit to Lebanon with Basma and their mother, Afra. "We wanted to go with her as she told us so much about it. She's the kind of person who is at home anywhere, but there was this extra energy." Sana recalls that her mother met her Glace Bay-born father in a philosophy class. "My mom took a shine to him and asked him for a coffee." She understands their connection as both felt the importance of being generous and welcoming. "And to them it's important to contribute to your community. And it's important to value education. That comes from both families who loved literature and poetry, and reading." Afra became a well-loved English literature teacher and professor. "She is intelligent and formidable."

Sana says the children were always aware of their family's bi-cultural nature. "More than one culture, more than one language, more than one religion. They'd tell us different stories; it kind of permeated our childhood." Although her mother is a wonderful cook, Sana chuckles about Afra's first attempts, while a student, to cook American food. "She tells the story of making peach pie by making Lebanese bread and putting canned peaches in between."

Sana's name often drew attention. "I never minded explaining what it was and how to say it. Some people are intrigued in a positive way; for some, an unfamiliar name is unsettling." Like her sister, her closest friends in Cape Breton were children of immigrants. "I felt different

**SANA
KAVANAGH**

More than one culture, more than one language, more than one religion. They'd tell us different stories; it kind of permeated our childhood.

as a child of a new immigrant, with a different religious background, and not part of an immigrant community that had been there over 100 years."

Sana says she was brought up always urged to excel. "Figure it out and do it well at all times. We were expected to be A+ students and go on to do interesting things. My mother would have loved it if we had gone on to be professors, but she's ecstatic that my sister is a poet, that I achieved higher education, and my brother is entrepreneurial." She grew up playing rugby, debating, and being a "science nerd." She has a B.Sc. in biology, but has also studied creative writing.

Sana was a research assistant in the Integrative Science Program at CBU bringing Mi'kmaw perspectives and values into the science curriculum, and led summer camps focused on creating excitement about science in young Mi'kmaw students. Her favourite project is writing about Mi'kmaw traditional ecological knowledge of eels. "Even though I was determined to study science, I think I had an interest in cultures. It came from my family where you're thinking of cultures from inside and outside."

One of Deputy Mayor Tony Mancini's favourite assignments is attending citizenship ceremonies. "I get to tell the story of my parents; I'm happy to tell it," says Tony. "And I ask them to go home tonight, celebrate, invite your neighbours and friends, have a meal together, share your customs and traditions, and ask them about theirs." He leaves feeling very emotional and happy to see the province's increasing diversity.

The youngest of three children in the only Italian family in St. Peter's, Cape Breton, Tony is aware of what it's like to be different. His parents, Evelina and Elio, immigrated after World War II. Elio, who'd been a prisoner-of-war, landed at Pier 21 in 1949, joining an uncle and brother. To sponsor Evelina, he married her over the telephone, Tony says, noting that his mother cried for the first six months here.

Elio worked in the Stirling Mines and then in his brother's restaurant. "We stuck out. Both my parents had a heavy accent and my dad had broken English." But they grew to be respected, buying a motel in 1969 and operating it for 12 years. "They opened that motel at 7 a.m. and worked til midnight." Tony did chores there, starting when he was nine. "That was a little hard at times, but that foundation gave me a good work ethic."

He was teased as a child, but used humour to deflect it. He also scored points: "My lunches were different than anyone else's and, to this day, my friends say I'd love going to your birthday party because you guys served pasta!" His oldest sister spoke fluent Italian but Tony wasn't interested. "My dad would speak to us in Italian and we'd answer in English. I wanted to fit in so I didn't embrace the culture until I got older." Relatives gathered for special occasions, eating Italian food and loudly playing card games. Food remains important as he tries to replicate his mother's cooking, and makes Italian sausages with cousins.

TONY MANCINI

They didn't speak the language and they didn't have much money. They are my heroes.

Tony says he was bright, but not academic. He worked in the oil business and then started Priority Management, a consulting training business. Nothing, however, has been more satisfying than being on council for Halifax Regional Municipality. Elio didn't live to see it, but 95-year-old Evelina devotedly watches council meetings on television every week. "I think immigrants look at politicians differently. They're not the bad guy; they are respected. We take voting for granted. When my kids could vote, we made a big deal about it."

While his mother never returned to Italy, his father went back a few times. Tony has traveled there and hopes to return with his two grown children. His sisters are now retired; Theresa was a CBC sales manager while Maria was a senior federal public servant. His father was so delighted he would call them "the best family in Canada." The pride goes both ways. "Neither had much education, culture was different, climate was different, food was different," says Tony. "They didn't speak the language and they didn't have much money. They are my heroes."





REEMA FULLER

When Reema Fuller was five, her family moved to India because of her father's work opportunity. Since she spent her formative years there, Reema, felt she had two identities. "My dad traveled back and forth for business. He'd bring tapes of TV shows, Robert Munsch stories, little hints of the culture," says Reema who has an older sister and younger brother. "When we moved back to Canada, in many ways I thought I was coming for the first time, mirroring the experience of my parents, but I evolved quickly from being Indian to being Canadian."

Her father immigrated in the early '70s from a village in the Punjab. He returned two years later, married, and brought his wife to Canada. They worked hard to integrate, but Reema recalls two incidents illustrating the seemingly little challenges of initial culture shock. Her father was poured a cup of tea on the train. "Tea was such a symbol of comfort. He's handed a pack of milk and didn't know how to open it. Confused, bewildered, and frustrated all in one minute." And her mother once called home on a layover during her first flight wondering how to operate a water fountain.

Reema's father, a "true entrepreneur," is a mechanical engineer who worked at various companies before establishing a successful now-international family business in the fencing industry. Her recently retired mother worked at soap and chocolate factories, and then 20 years as office manager of a second-hand-clothing company where she became the informal cultural and settlement advisor to a mostly immigrant staff of 100. While her parents' friends were mainly from India, Reema had a broad range. She often challenged assumptions of those from India. "Some who felt I wasn't Indian enough," says Reema, who knows both Hindi and Punjabi. "They grew up here learning about India in the '60s and '70s. I had come in from a more progressive approach." Her husband is third-generation Canadian, half British, half

I'm proud of my Indian culture and heritage, but I don't identify as an Indian living here.

Hungarian. "Of all the large extended family, the kid who grew up in India married outside," she laughs.

Reema earned degrees in business management, and non-profit philanthropy. She worked as fundraising officer at Coady Institute and as Director of Fundraising for the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, a move that concerned some family members. "Politics in India is a dirty business — corrupt and nothing good about it. But quickly doubt dissolved into a sense of pride. I had a leadership role, and they'd see me next to the Premier." She has been Managing Director of Festival Antigonish Summer Theatre and Theatre Antigonish since 2016. She is on the board of a non-profit daycare organization, and does volunteer political work.

Reema's interest in non-profits comes from her parents' charitable actions. She recalls her father's speech at her brother's wedding: "Be grateful to this country that has given you so much, embrace it and give back." She and her husband and eight-year-old twins celebrate Christmas and Divali. "I'm proud of my Indian culture and heritage, but I don't identify as an Indian living here. If anything, I'm an Ontarian living in Nova Scotia."

Matthew Ngo, a physics teacher at Citadel High School, has good and bad memories of growing up in Spryfield with Vietnamese as his first language. “We had three Miss MacKenzies in elementary school, and they were each unique and great. I felt so safe and grateful,” says Matthew. “Even though I was different, I had a teacher to rely on.”

He was sometimes treated poorly by other kids, and one day he was stabbed with a pencil on his ear. “I remember my mom frantically crying in the principal’s office. I was bleeding profusely.” He points to where the marks remain.

“Looking back, I feel like my treatment was either indirect or overt racism.” Because of an ethnic mix, high school was better, but he befriended other “social outcasts” as he was too poor to afford trendy clothes.

Matthew’s parents met here after immigrating to Canada separately. His father fought in the South Vietnamese navy during the Vietnam War. After the fall of Saigon, he fled to Australia, the US, and finally Halifax. His mother arrived with the Vietnamese “boat people.” Matthew still lives in the Spryfield house where he and his younger sister, now an Ontario chiropractor, grew up. Matthew’s parents worked hard to build a life. His father was a chief engineer in the Navy, while his mother, who had studied accounting, worked in retail once the kids left school. “She put her entire life on hold for us. I’ve always been proud of my parents, proud in many ways.”

Matthew excelled in his studies; his parents registered him in computer classes during school years, but after one year in computer science at Dalhousie University, he realized he hated it. He wanted to study meteorology, but positive experiences volunteering as an adult literacy tutor led him to education. “If I can do something for others and make their lives better, I can go to bed each night and think I did something good.”

MATTHEW NGO

I’ve always been proud of my
parents, proud in many ways.

He received a teaching job after substituting for only two months. He now teaches grades 10 to 12 and mentors struggling students. “Teaching is not always rosy. If I make a difference in at least one student’s life every day, in a positive way, I know I made my mission successful.” He hopes to eventually earn his Ph.D.

A community-oriented citizen, he served as Vice-President Internal Affairs of the Vietnamese Association of Nova Scotia, a group that organizes festivities and does community work. His father was a former president. His parents have visited Vietnam, but Matthew hasn’t, although he communicates with family there.

He is committed to staying in Halifax and appreciates its changes. “You see different ethnicities, food from different areas of the world, different customs acknowledged.” Matthew feels his Vietnamese identity is stronger now than ever and he acknowledges that his parents’ struggles have made him succeed. “My parents instilled in me and in my sister that the only way we’re going to be successful is to put in a lot of effort and hard work, and always live with the mentality of constantly learning and trying to become better.”





MARIA KESELJ

Maria Keselj's wisdom, confidence, and accomplishment belies her 17 years. The grade-12 student, enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program, is her student council's outreach coordinator, organizing fundraisers and volunteer opportunities.

She edits her high-school newspaper, founded the debating club, plays basketball and rugby, coaches children's basketball, studies advanced piano, and volunteers with Food Nova Scotia and the IWK.

Maria loves politics and has worked with the Liberal party, specifically on policy. "I always wanted to change things. Only recently did I realize doing that through a political platform is the best way to have your voice heard."

She's concerned with environmental issues, racial and gender equality, and mental health, with plans to start a federal-riding youth council to encourage youth participation. Passionate about more women in politics, she organized a non-partisan conference with all major parties.

Maria believes this passion came partly from her parents who immigrated to Canada in 1994 having left war-torn Sarajevo, now in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "I think my parents influenced me but they didn't know they did. They would always discuss politics and I would see how it could affect someone's life," she explains. "Their lives are uprooted because of bad politics. They also see immigration and how the program let them immigrate here."

Her father, Vlado, had a friend in Winnipeg he knew from the International Math Olympiad, so they settled there, eventually moving to Waterloo where he completed his Master's and Ph.D. They moved to Bedford in 2002. Vlado is a computer science professor at Dalhousie and Maria's mother, Tanja, is a senior systems analyst with the Nova Scotia Health Authority. "People who immigrate generally had to work harder to get jobs and see the value of education, and they want that for their kids," says Maria, the second of four kids; an older brother works in San Francisco with Google.

People who immigrate generally had to work harder to get jobs and see the value of education, and they want that for their kids.

She recalls, as a child, hearing people mock her parents' accent. "People assume a lower intelligence level when they hear an accent and treat them a bit condescendingly." Because of her last name she feels she must prove her capabilities. But growing up is also a "cool mixture" of both cultures, including traditional foods, dance, music, and celebrations of Orthodox holidays. Serbo-Croatian was her first language. "I was completely fluent. When we visit with my grandparents, it comes back."

The family returns to Sarajevo frequently. "Canadians are so nice that I'm saying sorry all the time and thank you, and then I get looked at really weird, or I'm opening the door and they're thinking what are you doing." She loves the culture of hospitality. "No one leaves the house hungry. I like that warm familiarity and camaraderie that comes with it." She's also fascinated by the history. "We're Bosnian Serbs; there have been so many struggles, but I hear the history and it's inspiring. They hid in the mountains during the Ottomans and preserved their religion. That perseverance really spoke to me."

Maria graduates this spring, planning to study physics or economics, eventually going into academia and then, unsurprisingly, politics. A name to remember.

One day last year, Monica Mutale, her parents, three older sisters, brother-in-law, niece and nephew stood in the middle of their Cole Harbour street, holding hands, posing for a special family portrait. It was the 30th anniversary of her parents' arrival in Canada. "You look at the circumstances my parents came out of, especially my dad and the poverty he experienced. All he wanted was a better life for his kids. He really looked at us with pure pride."

Monica's parents, Elias from Zambia, and Sheena, born in Congo but raised in Zambia, were tired of the political situation at home. Educated by Catholic missionaries, they spoke English so they moved to Canada in 1988 with three little girls. After studying at Acadia University, Elias became pastor at Baptist churches in the Annapolis Valley while Sheena practised social work.

"I know it was tough," says Monica. "Besides being cold, you're completely alone. The churches took us in and became our family." Monica was the only daughter born in Canada. "I always felt they had something special I didn't have. As a kid I would say they were African-Canadian and I was Canadian-African. I remember attending their citizenship ceremony and just feeling very left out." Two sisters speak their parents' native language, Bemba, fluently, while the third understands. "I can barely speak a word," says Monica. Her parents often organized African cultural events. "We'd look forward to it all year round. You get to share what was inside your house that almost felt like a secret."

The family moved to Halifax in 1998, as Sheena got a job here. They all remain, except one sister who works in human resources in Ontario. Another sister is a lawyer, while another works at a parent-resource centre. Following high school, Monica wasn't sure of her future. "I loved writing and the arts. That's still my goal, whether fiction or reporting." She

MONICA MUTALE

It's strange to have a place that feels like home, but doesn't feel like home.

earned her Bachelor of Journalism degree from the University of King's College in 2013. She worked in public relations and communications. Needing a break from her career path, she's currently a receptionist at a downtown spa. "I'd love to go back to school; I love learning," she says, adding that public-interest law is a possibility. A committed volunteer, she has led student and community organizations, and is past chair of the African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes. While working there, she helped girls' sports teams with equipment, communications, and social media. She also continues to assist newly arrived family and friends with their resumé.

Monica has visited Zambia three times. "I feel awkward there. It's strange to have a place that feels like home, but doesn't feel like home." She does enjoy connecting with her cousins, although language restricts communication with her grandmother. Monica was once envious of friends and family born in Zambia, but is now more confident in her identity. "I think the value of who I am has become more clear. I'm starting to see and appreciate the benefits of being born here and raised here."





Howard Ramos, son of an Ecuadorian immigrant, is an expert on the integration of immigrants and refugees in Canada. He grew up in Toronto, but didn't focus on immigration until moving 14 years ago to work at Dalhousie University's Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology.

**HOWARD
RAMOS**

Howard teaches, researches, and consults, often partnering on projects with ISANS and the provincial and federal governments.

Howard's father came to Canada at 33. "He was looking for opportunities, a new life, adventures. Canada seemed to be a reasonable country to come to, so he tried it out." He was in the navy and did telecommunications work throughout Latin America. His first wife disliked Canada and returned home.

He found work with CNCP Telecommunications. "It was a place he could see himself making a future," says Howard. His skills fit Canada's new immigration point system and there were language classes and community support. Howard says Toronto in the '70s was more like Halifax today. "There weren't sizable ethnic groups. You couldn't just say I'll just hang out with the Ecuadorians." His dad married a Canadian-born woman. "Part of the reason my first name is Howard is my parents wanted to ensure I had an English-sounding name so it would be easier to integrate and have a future in Canada."

Howard describes his dad, now 80, as forward looking, someone who learned French because he felt that's what you do as a Canadian. "There were bumps and hurdles, but overall if you asked him today where is your home, he'd say Toronto. But where are you really from, he'd say: 'actually, Etobicoke!' He certainly feels this is his country." The family returned once to Ecuador. "He regretted going back as it ruined his memory of the place." Howard doesn't feel a strong attachment the country. "It's not really my life; I'm just not interested. It sounds harsher

I feel I know my heritage and know my family I grew up with, and have strong attachments to them.

than it is, but it's also important to remember I grew up at a time when there was no internet and calling Ecuador was really expensive. And flying to Ecuador was prohibitive."

Howard has more cousins than he knows. "I feel I know my heritage and know my family I grew up with, and have strong attachments to them. The first thing people learn and the last thing people let go is the food. I grew up eating all kinds of South American food. To this day I love eating it." He also grew up eating perogies, borscht, and kielbasa, because his sister's father's family was Russian and an aunt often took care of them. "Everyone around me but my mom and sister were immigrants." His dad's friend was Iranian and they lived in a predominantly Portuguese neighbourhood. "That was my normal," says Howard, adding that his wife is from Japan.

Howard later moved to Manitoba, then back to Toronto to study sociology and social and political thought at York University, and Montreal for graduate work in sociology at McGill. He knew his father was happy with whatever future he chose, but one message was clear: "You have opportunities I didn't have, so don't waste them."

Bernadine Gerrits and her husband, Klaas, raised three children of their own and were foster parents to 22 others, something she mentions almost casually. Most were teenage girls. Some stayed overnight in emergency placements, many stayed several months, and a few became family. Bernadine describes it as a calling. “There were difficult situations by times,” she admits, “but in the end, the blessings are all ours.”

Giving and sharing was how she grew up as the fifth of eight kids. Her parents, Jan and Willemina Kamphuis, and Bernadine’s oldest brother, moved to Prince Edward Island from the Netherlands in 1953. They were allowed only \$25 each on arrival. “They were excited to be in Canada, but I remember my mom saying we were so poor,” says Bernadine. Jan was a baker at home, but worked at a milk factory and as manager of the dietary department at the Hillsborough Hospital. He studied to become an administrator, operating a seniors’ home in Charlottetown and later Ontario.

They were instrumental in establishing the Christian Reformed Church in Charlottetown, which provided an important social network. The family celebrated Dutch holidays and was active in their community of Alexandra, including organizations such as 4-H. Although Dutch was spoken at home, English was also encouraged as Bernadine’s parents were determined to be “Canadian.” Bernadine remembers her grandparents’ visits from Holland. “I can still see my grandfather trying to communicate with the teacher at my one-room school with both of them smiling at each other and gesturing back and forth, but neither having any idea what the other was trying to say.”

Through church activities she met her husband, from an Annapolis Valley Dutch farm family. They married a year after high school. He farmed and she worked retail. Nova Scotia had initiatives for young farmers, so after two years on PEI, they moved to the Valley and together built an award-winning hog farm. Bernadine also worked at a health-food

BERNADINE GERRITS

There were difficult situations
by times, but in the end, the
blessings are all ours.

store and a Dutch-Canadian shop. After selling the farm, Klaas worked in construction and then real estate.

Theirs was a lively household; they installed a pool so their house could be the gathering point for their children and their friends. Her family continues with Dutch traditions, including making hearty Dutch food. She chuckles recalling a future son-in-law trying to impress her by eating hagelslaag (chocolate sprinkles) — but on his ham sandwich instead of toast.

Bernadine feels blessed to continue giving back to her community by being involved with her family and church. Shortly after the sudden death of Klaas in 2015, the church began a grief support group called GriefShare which she now co-facilitates. She sits on the board of Ourhouse, an organization working towards opening a recovery centre for women with addictions. She also gladly watches her two granddaughters two days a week.

Bernadine says her parents are proud of being Dutch Canadians and of their Christian faith — true of the next generation as well. “I live my life 100 percent because of my Christian heritage. The part that’s the Dutch part? I don’t know how to separate the two.”





DAVID HUNG

Perhaps David Hung is destined to become a doctor. After all, when he was six, his physician father, Dr. Orlando Hung, would take him and his little brother to the hospital. “He’d find the smallest ‘johnny’ shirt he could find to cover our body and sit us on a table in the OR and let us observe open-heart surgery,” recalls David. “Our jaws would hit the floor and we’d think it was the coolest thing we’d ever seen! Our friends were so jealous.” Now 29, he is in third year at Dalhousie Medical School, while his brother is in first year and their sister is in second.

Orlando was born in Macau and was sent to high school in Hong Kong at the encouragement of a Jesuit priest. After graduating in 1975, he came to Canada to enrol at Saint Mary’s University. He is now an anesthesiologist at the QEII, Medical Director of Research in the Department of Anesthesiology, a Dalhousie professor, and an inventor of drug-delivery systems and medical devices. He married Jeanette, from Porter’s Lake, a career counsellor.

David describes his father as “the most positive, thankful, happy person.” The family hosted annual Chinese New Year’s parties but David didn’t identify with that part of his culture, except for attempting Chinese school. “I remember trying to learn the words and the ones I remember are foods; I like to eat.”

He did all he could to not go to medical school. “Growing up I thought I would make skateboard videos for the rest of my life.” When he was 14, his parents agreed to buy him a camera as long as he worked for his father. “My first job was filming medical procedures at the hospital.”

David earned a degree in theatre, and studied film so he could keep it as a passion. He then became a paramedic: “Incredible medicine, but it’s tough

He only wanted us to have two qualities — to be kind and be happy.

on the mind and tough on the body, overworked and underpaid. What’s worse is the cycle of tragedy — once you deal with one, there’s not a lot of time to debrief; you have 20 minutes to clean the truck and get back to work.” Four years was enough, so he then focused on making videos in Los Angeles with a friend, Tyler Ross, including music videos for Kanye West and an Adidas commercial with Kylie Jenner. “It was fun. It’s surreal.”

Volunteer work has always been important — David developed a program for teaching CPR to junior-high and high-school kids; he has helped with theatre variety shows for children with disabilities; in paramedic school he helped with charity fundraising.

David hasn’t decided on his future specialty — possibly emergency medicine or anaesthesia. “School is tough, but you get through it and still have time for life and puppies, significant others, and trips to L.A.” Through it all he keeps his immigrant dad’s advice. “His definition of success is so different from what I think is the traditional Chinese stereotype of success. He only wanted us to have two qualities — to be kind and be happy.”

Until he was school age, Labi Kousoulis had no idea his parents spoke English. “We only spoke Greek in the house,” says Labi, adding that he and his sister attended Greek school. “It was on Saturday mornings and we were missing cartoons; everybody was grumbling.”

Turns out his father was fluent in English and his mother spoke well. They had arrived separately at Pier 21 in 1957, and met here. His father was on his way to New Jersey to join other family, but he had a documentation problem. Post-World War II was difficult in Greece and he had been encouraged to leave his agricultural family for new opportunities. Labi’s mother had family in Halifax. “Like most immigrants they were tied together through the Greek community and church,” Labi explains.

His parents worked in the restaurant business; her first job was at the Armview and his, the Cameo. “He moved his way up from dishwasher to salad chef to cook.” They eventually became owners of the Floral, renamed the Spartan, the Doric, and the Coach Room at the Acadian Lines bus terminal.

They were happy here, but Labi recalls his father telling stories of establishments in the ‘50s having a sign listing unwelcomed ethnicities or people of colour. “I don’t know how many times, but I remember him facing that.” The family socialized with locals as well as Greek immigrants, maintaining customs that seldom changed. “They’re almost frozen in time. Even words we use are more proper, but people have moved away from those words in Greece.” He says he’s even seen better Greek dancers here than in Greece. His parents returned occasionally. “My dad would be regarded as having left and made it big.”

Labi played soccer as a youth and still coaches. He had Greek friends from Greek school and soccer, and other friends at school and the neighbourhood. “It was almost like two worlds, but they did overlap.

LABI KOUSOULIS

It was almost like two worlds, but they did overlap. It was a melting pot and it was very easy.

It was a melting pot and it was very easy.” Sundays at home were special with a Greek feast and music.

His parents advised him against following them into the restaurant business. “They worked so much. It didn’t matter what you do, go to university, get a good education. Life was golden when your marks were good.” Labi studied finance at Saint Mary’s University, which led to earning his Chartered Professional Accountant designation, and an MBA. He worked at Scotiabank in Truro and Amherst and as the controller at Trenton Works. He and his sister operated Zephyr Rug and Home, a business she continued to run until its recent closing.

Giving back to the community is important to Labi; he has volunteered at church, mentored graduate accountants, and chaired the Greek Festival. Labi is the member of the legislature for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, and Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, but his parents didn’t live to see his political career. “They would have been proud of me.” Labi even participates in World Hellenic Interparliamentary Association meetings for parliamentarians of Greek descent from around the world. Those language skills have certainly paid off.





SARA ABDO

Sara Abdo has fond memories of growing up in an Egyptian family in Halifax. “My sister and I would watch plays in Arabic with my mother and, of course, we would fall asleep halfway through,” she chuckles. “It was always three families together, round the kitchen table, the women preparing traditional pastries, the men hanging out teasing them, joining in, the babies running around.”

They spoke Arabic at home and enjoyed Arabic music. “I remember going through junior-high and high-school years asking my mom to do things as locals did. I was recognizing I was different in some ways, but still appreciating elements of my culture.”

Friends who have more recently come from Egypt are surprised at how current she is with Egyptian music and street language. “Are you sure you were born here?” they ask, jokingly.

Sara’s parents came to Canada in search of a better life — her father in 1987 and her mother in 1989. Her father’s best friend was already working here and able to help them settle. The small Egyptian community started the first Coptic Orthodox Church in Nova Scotia. Sara’s schools were not diverse, but she found people were supportive.

Sara’s dad, an engineer, died when she was seven but her mother remained in Canada, wanting her two daughters to be educated here. “That changed the dynamic and she had to be the mom and dad. I have not met a woman as tough as my mother in all that she did.” An accountant in Egypt, she worked here first in retail, then as a school lunch monitor, and today is an elementary-school educational-program assistant. The family visited Egypt often, but Sara and her sister sent their mother there for her first solo trip a few years ago — a rare opportunity to put herself first.

Sara, an occupational therapist, is ISANS’ disability support coordinator for new arrivals. “I help them navigate the health-care system. I help

I took the bits that I like from both cultures and made them my own.

them with health needs and building skills to empower them to take charge of their health needs.” Sara was planning to become a physician, but found that occupational therapy suited her better. “I enjoy being able to spend more time with people, more hands-on, and follow their growth and development.” During her studies, a placement with the Halifax Refugee Clinic provided an opportunity to focus on challenges for new arrivals, including their mental health.

Sara has an undergrad degree in microbiology, immunology, and Italian studies. “My dad spoke a couple of different languages and he lived in Italy and spoke Italian. It’s a passion of mine to learn about other cultures and languages,” says Sara, who also speaks French and has a diverse circle of close friends. She teaches Sunday School and is co-chair and co-founder of a national network to help occupational therapists support newcomers.

Sara considers herself equal parts Canadian and Egyptian. “I took the bits that I like from both cultures and made them my own.” Her family never pressured her to succeed, but she “genuinely wanted to make them proud out of love, and to say thank you.”

Ebony Abe is determined to succeed in life because of her mother's hard work and sacrifice. "On my mom's side, females were expected to stay home and care for the children. My mom really branched out and inspired me," says Ebony, explaining that after high school in the Philippines, her mother worked three jobs so she could study midwifery.

She moved to Canada to work as a personal-care worker until she could sponsor her husband. He worked in a department store and once their two children were in school, she enrolled at Nova Scotia Community College to become a Continuing Care Assistant. "I remember her leaving really early in the mornings when I was in grade six," recalls Ebony. "She was really excited but nervous as she had a job interview. We told her she could do it, and she ended up getting the job. She was so excited!"

Ebony's household was religious and focused around Filipino friends and culture. The parents eventually separated. "My mother was a stereotypical Asian mother; she was strict growing up. I wasn't allowed sleepovers. She always needs to know where I am and if I'm eating well." Although her schools' population was diverse, Ebony and her brother Jerecho were two of few Asians, something she feels made them popular. "We were known to have the coolest lunches. My mom would make us rice and ethnic food. Sometimes, I would trade my lunches so I could have Canadian food or junk food."

Ebony visited the Philippines at seven, and feels strong about her Filipino heritage. She is frequently asked her identity; she says, Canadian. "And they'd say no, what ARE you?" Laughing, Ebony says she then offers the details: "My dad is one-tenth-Japanese, the rest Filipino. My mom is one-third Chinese, one-third Spanish and one-third Filipino."

EBONY ABE

My mom really branched out and inspired me.

In awe of aviation, Ebony and Jerecho joined the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, a program to which Ebony attributes her personal growth. "I was very introverted and broke out of my shell." Although only 13, she quickly moved into leadership roles, encouraging others to volunteer in their community. "I found I loved teaching and assisting the younger kids. I worked with youth with backgrounds similar to mine. It makes me reflect and work around their differences to make them feel supported and included." She received the Lord Strathcona Medal, awarded to a Cadet showing exceptional performance in physical and military training. Ebony was also sworn into the Cadet Instructors Cadre, becoming an officer, and has worked as a flight commander at CFB Greenwood.

Jerecho graduated in criminology from Saint Mary's University, while Ebony is in her fourth year of applied human nutrition at Mt. St. Vincent. Interested in industry and policy, she hopes to work with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Her mother's struggle stays with her. "She's always wanted the best for us. Throughout school she really supported us making sure we're doing well with the main goal of doing equivalent to what she's done, or past it."





MANUEL MONCAYO ADAMS

Nineteen-year-old Manuel Moncayo-Adams is on a challenging journey to fully understand his Colombian heritage and how it affects his life. His Colombian-born father, a veterinarian, settled in Canada in 1988 after meeting and marrying Rose Adams, a highly acclaimed Nova Scotia artist who was working in Colombia with Canada World Youth.

The family lived in Dartmouth and in the rural community of Port Lorne. Manuel spoke Spanish as a child and grew up surrounded by music and art. He learned piano, guitar, and euphonium, and played basketball. He ate Latin food, connected with people in the Latin community, and traveled to Colombia as a child. On one such trip, the family adopted a seven-year-old girl, Flor-Angie, just five months older than Manuel. His parents eventually separated and Manuel's bond with his mother strengthened, while his connection to his father and the Colombian side of his heritage weakened.

He enrolled in Carleton University in Ottawa in global politics. He also studied Spanish as he had forgotten so much. Although global politics remains important, Manuel left after one year to work toward a Bachelor of Community Design at Dalhousie University. He is particularly interested in urban design. "I think my new direction with planning and architecture is heavily influenced by Colombian social structure and how Colombian cities have used design to heal from decades of violence," he explains.

Manuel is intrigued by Colombia and its history, and returned there for a month last year, accompanied by his father for the first week. Once on his own, he used his vastly improved language skills to get to know his family and to restore "the legitimacy" of his Colombian identity. "It's a battle of trying to re-establish that identity on my own terms." Manuel is compelled to learn as much as he can. "It's important to me because my parents' moral and political philosophy has shaped my politics and my view of the

It's a battle of trying to
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my own terms.

world," he says. "I felt culturally Canadian, but I wasn't recognized as such. Everyone else had their visions of what Colombian meant. I knew it made me different, but I didn't know how. I was Colombian, but I didn't feel it; it was like I threw a spear and it didn't stick."

Manuel hopes to travel soon to Colombia along with his mother. His return to Halifax has allowed him to be closer to her art and to reconnect with the community arts scene. They once created pieces for a gallery fundraiser, and he enjoys assisting her at Paint the Town, a summer arts festival in Annapolis Royal.

Manuel is working on an architecture portfolio for which he must include concepts of design in his art. He's not positive of plans after he graduates, but he knows his father's heritage will play a leading role. "One of my fantasies is I'd somehow make Colombia part of my working life and try to see connections there. I'm trying to use the stuff I learned and saw in Colombian cities to form my perspective of cities and community here and meld those two."

Jimmy Christeas is so busy he won't sit still for an interview, running back and forth from the cash to the backroom at Quinpool Shoe Repair, a business he has managed for 10 years and worked in since he was a kid. It has the ambiance of an old-fashioned business where family members drop by to help, friends hang out just to chat, and customers are greeted by name. Business is booming, as it's one of the few remaining shoe repairs.

Jimmy — his actual name is Dimitri — is the son of Greek immigrants who came to Nova Scotia in the '60s. They met here as Jimmy's father came first along with his five sisters, some of whom returned to Greece. His mother came from the island of Lesbos. His dad was a cobbler in Greece but found restaurant work when he arrived. He later opened a shoe repair on Dutch Village Road and then Bayers Road, where Jimmy would hang out after school while his mom worked as a hairdresser. "I started shining shoes, trimming high-heel lifts at 14. I was just fiddling pretty much, not really working. I was there to come home with him."

Jimmy refers to his west-end home growing up as "a hardcore Greek household, like the back villages of Greece. My parents hardly knew any English so we spoke Greek at home." There was Greek food and music. The Greek community was small, but tight. "They would do the traditional thing of visiting other shops and hanging around chatting, laid-back Greek style of social living. They're still like that."

His parents have been happy in Canada, but they actually returned to Greece for a couple years when Jimmy was seven and built a house. "The kids knew I was from Canada. I was like a Hollywood star, the little Greek-Canadian. They were pretty fascinated by it." He describes his parents as "old school" but says they didn't mind him going out and

JIMMY CHRISTEAS

I was like a Hollywood star, the little Greek-Canadian. They were pretty fascinated by it.

coming home late. "They didn't know the word 'grounded' so I didn't mention anything to them," he chuckles.

About 30 years ago, his father bought the shoe repair on Quinpool Road, which Jimmy eventually took over and last year moved across the street. Jimmy left high school to work, and for a while went to night school to finish up his courses. "My parents wanted me to go further with school, but it wasn't going to happen," he explains. "One thing my parents never did is pressure me. They saw me as more of a working type than going to school."

Jimmy lives with his elderly parents and returns every summer to Sparta, often with his son Kosta, an engineering student. He has two sisters — his older one works in a market and the other is a pharmacist. He enjoys the business and the camaraderie it provides. He says repairs change over the years as there are now a lot of plastic shoes and soles. He treats his customers well and takes good care of their shoes, as did his father before him.



